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The Great Tree of Avalon: Child of the Dark Prophecy

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Barron, T. A. *The Great Tree of Avalon: Child of the Dark Prophecy*. Philomel Books, 2004.
ISBN 0399237631. \$19.99. 434 pp.

Reviewer: Sandra L. Tidwell

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young Adult

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Fantasy Fiction;

Subject: Fantasy; Magic - Fiction; Avalon (legendary place) - Fiction;

The fantasy land of Avalon, as created by Barron, is a huge tree planted by Merlin which bridges Earth and Heaven. The story begins in the Year of Darkness in the realm of Fireroot within Avalon where two infant boys, Scree and Tamwyn, are saved from destruction. The Lady of the Lake's ancient prophecy is being fulfilled. The prophesy says that as the stars darken, a boy will be born who could destroy Avalon and the only one to save it will be Merlin's true heir. As the seven stars in the constellation which represents Merlin's staff go out one by one, Elli, a young priestess, Tamwyn, a homeless wild boy, and Scree, an eagle boy, go through many adventures to figure out how they can stop Kulwych, the sorcerer, and his apprentice, Harlech, from destroying Avalon.

Barron's Avalon is unique and full of an interesting array of life forms: humans, animals, giants, dwarves, museos, maryths, dragons, living stones, and wizards. Maryths and their interactions with each other and their "owners" bring another dimension to the main characters. In Avalon, communication between mortal and immortals is very important. To facilitate this communication, each priest and priestess are paired with a maryth, "so that none of us would ever forget to open our ears to other songs - no matter how different the melody, or how strange the rhythm" (p. 129).

This is the first of Barron's newest trilogy. Barron has woven a complex tale where the common quest for right to prevail is being thwarted by the selfish motives of evil. It also carries a number of varied themes, including appreciating the worth of both animals and humans, understanding the role of personal choice in one's destiny, and understanding how life experiences heal aching hearts. The story does not end with this book. Tamwyn has yet another long journey ahead of him. While emotions run high in all the characters throughout the book, the final struggle between the good and evil is especially intense and violent. While waiting for the next book in this series to be published, readers can enjoy rereading this intricate tale, to more clearly understand the characters, their origins and their powers.